

Seeing Stars Through Prison Bars

INTRODUCTION

Two men sat behind prison bars. One saw mud. The other saw stars. The title of our series through Philippians has been Seeing Stars Through Prison Bars because the apostle Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter of rejoicing. In prison Paul did not have any way to take care of his physical needs. The guards in a Roman prison didn't take care of you. They didn't provide your food or your clothing; someone on the outside had to give you food and clothing if you were going to survive. The church at Philippi, 800 miles away, had sent a gift through a messenger named Epaphroditus. Now Paul gets around to saying thank you for sending that gift to meet his needs. And in this passage, we're going to learn a great lesson about the God who provides.

Philippians 4:14-23 says:

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs [notice—not all your “wants”] according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus. ²¹ The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. [This indicates some in Caesar’s household had become Christians] ²² All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

We would generally visit my grandmother's house around Christmas or Thanksgiving. When we walked in her home, there was the smell of turkey, dressing, rolls, fresh vegetables—whatever she was cooking. There just something about the smell of Grandmother's house that brings back good memories. Well, the Bible says in a real sense that when you make a sacrificial gift to God, it is like a

beautiful fragrance that rises up and reaches the nostrils of God. And so I want to ask you, what kind of gift are you going to be giving him?

And Paul is writing to say thank you for your gift. Now that's one point of this message. And the other point is that if you are faithful to give sacrificially, God will meet all your needs. Philippians 4:19 is one of the greatest promises in all the Bible. I heard Billy Graham say one time that there are 365 promises in the Bible, one promise for every day of the year. Then Dr. Graham went on to talk about a dear Korean lady who was a Christian who had a little box of Bible promises. On each card was a different Bible promise. One morning she was going through a very difficult day, facing some difficult decisions. And she said, "God, I really need a special promise from you today." She got her little box of promises and was walking over to the window to get more light to read when she tripped on her rug and fell, spilling all those promises. It was as if God said to her, "My child, you don't have to restrict yourself to one promise a day. All my promises are yours all the time." And she got up off the floor, rejoicing that all of God's promises were available to her. Of all the promises in the word of God, it's hard to find a greater promise than Philippians 4:19.

I. THE SOURCE OF THE PROMISE (4:19)

The source of the promise is found in the first part of that verse: "My God shall supply..." (verse 19) Paul was saying that God is the source of this promise. He's the one who stands behind it.

1. A personal promise

Paul is saying that he knows God personally. He says, "And based on my prior experience with God, I can tell you that my God is going to supply all your needs." When I was in seminary, I had a classmate who interrupted every time somebody would say, "This is what happened at *my* church last Sunday..." He would say, "Don't ever say *my* church. It's not *your* church. It's the *Lord's* church." He made us all paranoid, but I think it's okay to say "my" church. You're not saying that you own your church. When you say, "my God," you're certainly not saying you own God. When you say "my God..." like Paul said here, all that means is that you have that intimacy with him, that you can call him your own. Don't you like the way the Psalms read? It says, "The Lord is *my* shepherd..." Aren't you glad it doesn't say "the Lord is *the* shepherd"? In John chapter 20, Thomas stood before the Lord Jesus. And he said, "I'm not going to believe unless I can see the nail prints in his hands and put my finger in them..." So when Jesus appeared to him, Thomas said, "My Lord! My God!"

I read a book entitled *Your God is Too Small*. And that's the problem. A lot of people have a concept of God that's not the biblical concept of God. Your god may not be the God that Paul's talking about here. For some people, sadly, their god is

some kind of an evil figure in heaven who's always trying to bring vengeance and hurt people.

My God, on the other hand according to the apostle Paul, is a loving father who wants to supply the needs of his children. Jesus said in Luke 11:13 (talking to fathers), “If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall the heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask?” God delights to meet the needs of his children.

2. A positive promise

It's a dangerous thing to make a promise you can't live up to, but when you can make a bold promise and live up to it, it gets attention. In 1969 a bold, brash quarterback made a big promise while sitting around the pool before the Super Bowl, claiming the Jets were going to beat the Colts. Everybody laughed, but Joe Namath was right! He made a bold promise, and he lived up to it. The apostle Paul does that. Paul was a good Jew, and he knew his Old Testament. Every time Israel needed something, God provided it.

Jehovah Jireh is one of the names of God. That means he is “the provider.” The word “provide” comes from two Latin words, *pro* meaning “before” and *video* (to see). When the Bible says God is a provider, it means he sees before we even know we have the need. God has already seen it, and he's already moved to meet our need. We call it the Providence of God. The Providence of God means he's going to take care of us. When the children of Israel were out in the desert, didn't have anything to drink. God provided water out of a rock. When they were out in the desert, had nothing to eat. God provided manna from heaven. When they needed a leader, God provided Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Deborah, Esther, David, Solomon—every time they needed a leader, God provided it. In Acts 8, you see how many times God supernaturally provided for the apostle Paul. That's why Paul could say, “I know from experience that he's going to meet all your needs.”

I believe in the Providence of God, rather than luck. I was playing golf with ab buddy who drove the ball about 315 yards. And somebody said that was a lucky drive. I said, “No, that drive was blessed by God. Luck had nothing to do with it!” Have you ever heard somebody say they were lucky to avoid an accident? Luck had nothing to do with it. That's the Providence of God. The only kind of luck I believe in LUCK—Living Under Christ's Knowledge. Paul didn't say to this church, “Good luck to you.” No, he said, “My God shall supply all your needs.”

II. THE SCOPE OF THE PROMISE (4:19)

What does it include? It includes all your needs. Not all your greeds, not all your desires, not all your wants, but all your needs. You and I are a bundle of needs from the cradle to the grave. We're one series of needs after another. And the Bible says that God can meet our needs. We are a spirit, soul, and a body. We are a

physical being, spiritual being, emotional being, and relational being. God meets all of our needs.

1. Spiritual needs

Everybody has a spiritual need for salvation. I hope that you understand that salvation only comes as a gift from God. It is something God gives you. You can't earn it. The Bible says the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You receive salvation as a free gift, or you don't receive it at all. It's something God gives you. He provides it. Everyone has a sense of guilt and needs forgiveness. The only way you can receive forgiveness is as a gift from God. You cannot buy God off. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come into them." When the Holy Spirit comes knocking on their door, some people slide a \$20 bill under the door and say, "Here, Lord, will that take care of it?" They're so used to buying their way out of trouble, but you can't buy your way out of guilt. The only way you can receive forgiveness is as a free gift that God provides.

God also gives you power over temptation. God also gives you a future home in heaven. God supplies our spiritual needs. The only way you can be saved is to say, "Lord Jesus, I humbly receive what you provide."

2. Relational needs

The most important relationship that everybody needs is a relationship with God. And Paul says, "He has met that need because God initiated a relationship. He moved first." I like what the Psalmist says: "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants for you." Here's a picture of a deer running through the woods until he's exhausted. He comes up to a clear running spring and stands there panting before the deer begins to lap up that cool, refreshing water. The Bible says just as a deer pants for the water, my soul pants for you. Can you honestly say that you have that kind of a desire to have a relationship with God? He wants to have fellowship with you. And he's already provided a way through Jesus Christ. The Bible says God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son... he provided for you.

Also, we all need friends. No man is an island unto himself. That's why the church is so important. That's why you gather for worship so that you can have that Christian fellowship that God provides.

What about the family that you have? Do you know where that came from? I thank God for my wife and my two daughters, but I realize that I did not earn that. I did not deserve that. I look at my family as one of the greatest blessings that God has ever given me, meeting those relational needs. And I know there are some of you who may be lonely. There may be some of you who are single, and you want to get married. You may be like the lady who was not married and she didn't want to pray a real selfish prayer. So she just said, "Lord, I don't want to ask for a husband for

myself. But if you would provide my mother a son-in-law, I would really appreciate it.” God wants to provide for those relational needs.

3. Material needs

Some people have ruined this promise by what I call the health and wealth prosperity gospel. And they'll say, “Just be faithful to God, and you'll have gold rings, diamonds, Mercedes, and mansions. You'll get rich...if you just trust God enough.” But the Bible doesn't say all your luxuries, all your wants. It says, my God shall supply all your needs. But physical and material needs are the actual context of this message. Paul said, “You have given me a financial gift. And I want to tell you that because you've been faithful, God is going to meet your needs.”

Can't you imagine what happened over there in the Philippi church? Epaphroditus stood up one night before the church and said, “Folks, we've got to help Paul. He's a struggling missionary over there in Rome, and he's in prison. We've got to help him meet his needs.” If he'd had slides, he would have showed slides of Paul, starting all these churches all over everywhere. He said, “Come on...dig deep, give sacrificially, give ‘til it hurts.” You've all heard it before, haven't you? So some of them gave a sacrificial gift, but let's say some of them started having second thoughts.

“What if maybe I shouldn't have given all that money? Who knows what could happen now? Maybe my chariot's going to break down. Maybe the kids are going to need new sandals. Maybe we'll have to repair our aqueduct.” We start asking all the “what if” questions. We think, “I want to be kind of careful with what I give. What if I lose my job? What if the stock market plunges again? What if there's a bad recession?”

And Paul says, “I want you to remove the ‘what ifs’ from your mind, because I'm here to tell you that my God is going to supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory.” I don't know what your financial situation is personally, but statistically speaking, if you have a full stomach, clothes on your back, you drive in an automobile that you own, and you live in a house, you are in the top 5% of the world's population when it comes to material goods. But we tend to complain and say, “If only I had a little more...”

Can you honestly say, “God, I believe that you have met my needs. You've met beyond my needs. God, I thank you for that material sustenance that you've given me.”

III. THE SECURITY OF THE PROMISE (4:17)

A check is only as good as the financial institution that stands behind it. Let me tell you the difference between “out of his riches” and “according to his riches” in 4:19. Imagine I'm walking down the street with someone who is a wealthy millionaire, and this wealthy millionaire comes up on someone who has a real need. Maybe they haven't eaten in a week and don't have a place to stay. And let's

say this wealthy millionaire says, “Here’s 20 bucks, get yourself a meal. And here’s 20 more. Find yourself a place to stay tonight.”

That’s nice. That millionaire has given out of his riches. But that’s just a drop in the bucket. So let’s say that same millionaire hears about a need on the mission field to build a home for orphans. And this millionaire is really convicted in his spirit.

After much prayer, he writes a check for \$500,000. Do you know the difference? Forty bucks is just out of his riches, but half a million dollars is *according* to his riches. We do not serve a Father who is a pauper. He owns the cattle on a thousand Hills. And Paul has said, “I am going to promise that God will meet all your needs...just look at all the riches that are in glory through Christ Jesus.

We need to come to a point where we say, “God, I am trusting you as the source of my security...not my job, nothing else, except you.” It’ll free you up. Where is your security? Really? Some of you are well off financially. Is that what your security is—in your stocks and your bonds? I’ll tell you the only stocks and bonds Paul knew anything about were the stocks on his feet and the bonds that were chained to his arms. Is your security in your portfolio, your job, your bank account? Jesus said where your heart is, that’s where your treasure is.

If the truth were known, some people have a heart that is cold, dry, and dead, because their heart is in a bank vault somewhere. And a bank vault is cold, dead, and dry. And where your treasure is, that’s where your heart is. Jesus said, “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moth and rust will corrupt them and thieves will break in and steal them. Instead, lay up treasures in heaven.”

In verse 17, Paul says, “Not that I’m looking for a gift, but I’m looking for what may be credited to your account.” What account? Your heavenly account. Some people have several accounts—checking, savings, etc. But you’ve also got an account in heaven. Paul said to the church, “When you gave a gift to me, it was credited to your account in heaven.”

God is your source. He is your security. When you know that, it frees you up. Sometimes men will tell me there is something going on at their job that they don’t agree with. It may be something unethical, for example, or something that goes against their Christian principals. And they’ll say to me, “I don’t know what to do about it, because if I blow the whistle and turn a man, or if I just refuse to do what they’re asking me to do, I will lose my job.”

What they say next reveals so much about that person. Some men say, “I may lose my job if I do the right thing, but that’s okay. God’s going to take care of me.” I praise the Lord for that kind of attitude. Some men say, “If I lose my job, then I’m done. I’m washed up. I don’t know what I’m going to do. What’s going to happen for me and my family?”

One response is a profession of faith, and the other is a profession of faithlessness. We must say, “God, I know I will have all my needs met by you. Not my job, not

my employer, not my bank account, not my securities account. You alone. God, you are my source of security.”

CONCLUSION

Philippians 4:19 is a blank check. Imagine putting your name in the “pay to the order of” line and then fill in the amount: “all my needs.” God has already signed the check, he’s Jehovah Jireh. My provider. Then you have to endorse the check by signing the back. By an act of your will, you can endorse Philippians 4:19 for your life and trust God from this day forward to provide all your needs.

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

I. THE SOURCE OF THE PROMISE (4:19)

- 1. A personal promise**
- 2. A positive promise**

II. THE SCOPE OF THE PROMISE (4:19)

- 1. Spiritual needs**
- 2. Relational needs**
- 3. Material needs**

III. THE SECURITY OF THE PROMISE (4:17)

CONCLUSION